

Roddy McDowall, left, and Pal in the 1943 film “Lassie Come Home.”

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WHO’S A GOOD DOG?

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Eighty years ago, “Lassie Come Home” opened in theaters, featuring a pair of child actors who would go on to great Hollywood fame: Roddy McDowall and Elizabeth Taylor.

The *real* star of the movie, however, was Pal: a male rough collie who would play the role of the female title character in a series of movies over the next decade.

THE FIRST LASSIE FILM: ‘LASSIE COME HOME’

The character of Lassie was created by author Eric Knight, who wrote a story about a collie, reluctantly sold by a poor family who then escaped her new owners and then wandered cross-country from Scotland to Yorkshire to reunite with the boy she loved.

The story, which appeared in the Saturday Evening Post in

December 1938, was so well-received that Knight expanded it into a novel published in 1940. It was just a matter of time before Hollywood came knocking.



While the movie version was set in Scotland and England, it was filmed in Washington state and Monterey, California. Fifteen-year-



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Also appearing in the 1943 Lassie movie: Elizabeth Taylor.

old British actor Roddy McDowall played the poor schoolboy who was forced to give up his dog. Nigel Bruce — already famous for playing Dr. Watson in Sherlock Holmes films — played the rich Duke who buys and attempts to relocate Lassie. A last-minute replacement playing the Duke’s daughter was 11-year-old Elizabeth Taylor.

Hollywood Dog trainer Rudd Weatherwax supplied a 1-year-old

male collie named Pal to play the part of Lassie. Pal reportedly earned \$250 per week while making the first “Lassie” film while Taylor made only \$100 a week.

“Lassie Come Home” would be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Color Cinematography. What’s more, it would be a big box office hit, making MGM Pictures a tidy profit and inspiring a series of sequel movies — many of which would feature Pal.

LASSIE’S MANY SEQUELS AND REMAKES



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SON OF LASSIE APRIL 1945

Young Joe grows up, becomes a pilot during World War II and is shot down over Nazi territory with Laddie, the son of his beloved Lassie. Stars Peter Lawford and June Lockhart.



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COURAGE OF LASSIE NOVEMBER 1946

The dog, called Bill in this film, is used by the army in the Aleutian Islands Campaign before returning home. Stars 14-year-old Elizabeth Taylor.



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HILLS OF HOME DECEMBER 1948

Lassie, bought by a Scottish country doctor, overcomes her unnatural fear of water to save the doctor’s life when he’s injured in an accident. Stars Edmund Gwenn and Janet Leigh.



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THE SUN COMES UP MAY 1949

A bereaved woman learns how to love again thanks to an orphan boy and the dog owned by her late son. Stars Jeanette MacDonald, who sings in this musical.



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CHALLENGE TO LASSIE OCTOBER 1949

After Lassie’s master dies, an old friend tries to convince a judge that the dog’s life should be spared. Stars Edmund Gwenn and, in his fourth Lassie film, Donald Crisp.



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THE PAINTED HILLS MAY 1951

“Shep” gets revenge when greedy gold mine claim jumpers nearly kill a young boy. Stars Paul Kelly, Bruce Cowling and, in his seventh and final appearance, Pal.

LASSIE (RADIO SHOW) JUNE 1947-MAY 1950

While the radio program was called “Lassie,” the name of the dog varied from episode to episode as she wandered the countryside helping people and other animals. Pal — clearly capable of whining, barking and panting on cue — was brought in to play the the dog. The program ran for one season on ABC radio network before jumping to the NBC radio network for two more seasons.



LASSIE TELEVISION

LASSIE (TV SHOW) SEPTEMBER 1954-1973

The first live-action incarnation of Lassie to not feature Pal, this series ran for 591 episodes over 19 seasons. For 10 seasons, Lassie lived on a farm — first with the Miller family and then the Martin family — the latter of which adopted “Timmy,” who became Lassie’s pal. For six seasons, Lassie worked with forest rangers. For one season, Lassie wandered wild. For the final two seasons, Lassie lived on a ranch for orphan boys.



FILMATION

LASSIE’S RESCUE RANGERS NOVEMBER 1972

Lassie leads a team of wild animals that work with rangers at Thunder Mountain Park. Weatherwax said about the show: “That’s not Lassie. That’s trash.” It ran only 16 episodes on ABC.



LASSIE PICTURES

THE MAGIC OF LASSIE AUGUST 1978

This children’s musical was so poorly received that star James Stewart took reviews as a sign to retire from movies. It also starred Mickey Rooney, Pernell Roberts, and Stephanie Zimbalist.



PARAMOUNT PICTURES

LASSIE JULY 1994

A city family moves to a farm and adopts an abandoned collie, who forms a bond with their young son. Starred Thomas Guiry, Helen Slater and Jon Tenney and was produced by Lorne Michaels.



SAMUEL GOLDWYN FILMS

LASSIE SEPTEMBER 2006

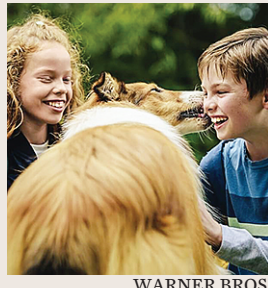
A remake of the original 1943 film starred Peter O’Toole, Samantha Morton, Jonathan Mason and Peter Dinklage. Unlike the original, this one was filmed in Scotland, Ireland and on the Isle of Man.



SUPERPROD

LASSIE FEBRUARY 2014

Essentially a remake of the animated series from 42 years before, this animated series lasted 52 episodes over two seasons in France and Germany. It began running in the U.S. in 2020 on Paramount+.



WARNER BROS.

EINE ABENTEUERLICHE REISE FEBRUARY 2020

This German remake of the original follows Lassie’s adventure as she wanders across southern Germany looking for the little boy and girl she loves.